



The Blank-Cartridge Ballot.

By Rossiter Johnson.

TAKE from your pocket a dollar bill, smooth it out, and look at it. It is handsomely engraved, its declarations are in good legal phrase, it is elaborately numbered, and it carries as a portrait either the strong face of Edwin M. Stanton or the handsome face of Martha Washington. Why is it that that note will buy twenty loaves of bread, or a hundred bricks, or a new novel, or a ticket to the theater, or a forty-mile ride on a railroad? Is it because paper is so precious, and ink so rare? Is it because of the fine engraving, or the legal phraseology, or the interesting portrait? All these circumstances are incidental and intrinsically worthless; the one fact that gives it universal purchasing power is the universal knowledge that somewhere behind it there is a piece of gold whose intrinsic value is

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equal to that of twenty loaves of bread, or a hundred bricks, or a new novel, or a seat in the theater, or a forty-mile railway ride, and that the holder of it can have that piece of gold whenever he chooses to call for it. Raise in the minds of the holders of those commodities a serious doubt as to the existence or the availability of that piece of gold, and you can no longer get the articles for your twenty-one square inches of printed paper. They will only smile at the portraits and hand them back to you, though Mr. Stanton was for four years the most gigantic purchasing-agent that ever stood on this continent, and Martha Washington is the most revered of American women.

If, then, a piece of paper unbacked by metal cannot procure us a bag of salt or a yard of calico, can another piece, equally unbacked by metal, procure the passage and execution of laws, the revision of constitutions, the distribution of property, the regulation of wages, and the security of life?

The most civilized portions of mankind have not yet outgrown the measurement of force for the ultimate settlement of every great question, and the unit of force is the man capable of bearing arms. As the financial world has invented bank-notes, checks, and letters of credit, which pass

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current for the things they represent, while the savage is still trading only with his actual cowrie-shells, wampum, and hoop-iron, so various devices have been brought into use by which available force can be measured and the result of a conflict be foretold, so that the destined losers submit without a conflict and thus save life and treasure. This is the philosophy of a popular election. The appeal to reason is made in the preliminary canvass. All the arguments, *pro* and *con.*, are set forth—generally over and over again—by the orators, the journalists, and the talkers of the club-house and the tavern. Then the ballots are cast and counted, and the result is announced, and the announcement is essentially this: “So many thousand units of military force are enlisted on the affirmative side of this question, and so many thousand on the negative.” Then those who find themselves in the minority give up, and permit the majority to have their way; not because they are convinced that they have been in the wrong and their opponents in the right, but because they know that if they do not submit peaceably they will be compelled to do so. And no legal enactment or chartered privilege can forever maintain the opposite state of affairs. We have had some notable instances of attempts in that direction, but all have failed. This was

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exemplified by the "Dorr war" in Rhode Island. For more than half a century after the establishment of our republic, the government of that State was still based on a charter granted by Charles II. This gave the right of suffrage only to men who had real estate to the amount of \$134 and to their eldest sons, and legislative representation was so arranged that Newport had six members, while Providence, with a population three times as great, had only four. In 1842 there was an insurrection of the majority who were thus wronged, and though the forms of law were all in favor of the prescriptive rights of the minority, and the military were called upon to subdue the rebellion, and the National Government recognized existing State authorities, yet the outcome was a new constitution with a proper division of power. This was yielded by the minority, not because they suddenly woke up to the fact that they were doing wrong,—all that had been clearly set forth long before,—but simply because they recognized the presence of a force that would compel them to. Twenty years later we had another, and vastly greater, experience in which the metallic power behind the paper ballot had to be actually brought into play. Nobody denied that the presidential election of 1860 was fairly conducted and the result correctly declared. But it turned on a

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very important question, and feeling ran high. Those who found themselves in a minority believed that they were still so numerous and so united, and had so many circumstances in their favor, that they need not submit; and accordingly they refused to do so. Thereupon the majority proceeded to compel them, and though it was an enormous and bloody task, it was carried through to completion, and the minority were convinced—not that they were in the wrong, but simply that they were a minority of the military power as well as of the ballot-casters. If half of Grant's army had fired nothing but blank cartridges, Lee never would have surrendered.

And since the civil war we have had another exhibition of the same principle, in a different way, which still remains with us as a gigantic object-lesson showing the impotence of a blank-cartridge ballot. The colored men of the Southern States have the legal right to vote, yet they are not permitted to vote in any place, or to any extent; that would turn the scale of an election. This is not from lack of intelligence; for many of them are well educated, and are quite as intelligent as some of the whites. It is not because they are untaxed; for, although they began in 1865 with absolutely nothing, they now pay taxes on an assessment of ten million dollars in Virginia,

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twelve million in Georgia, fifteen million in Texas, and similar sums in other States. It is simply because the white men are fully armed, and understand very thoroughly the art of organization. If the time should ever come when every colored man owns a Winchester rifle, and when the race has learned how to organize, then the colored vote will be cast and will be counted.

All this may be very deplorable, but it is the state of affairs that exists, and with it we are compelled to deal. Nor is it confined to our country. When gunpowder came into use, and the man on horseback was unseated, suffrage began to be popularized, and it has been widening ever since, but it only follows the development of the rifle. The successive enlargements of the franchise in Great Britain have all been wrung from the unwilling or hesitating consent of those who, being themselves enfranchised, held the place of an aristocracy, and grudgingly shared their privileges with an awakening and dangerous power. In the United States, every good citizen deplores the naturalization of foreign-born men who have not been long enough in the country to understand its institutions. But the only safety is in making the term of probation inversely proportional to the numbers that are coming, lest we acquire too large an unfranchised population.

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which by concentrating its strength may in some places overturn the civil order. The true remedy is to restrict immigration, or forbid it altogether for a terms of years. The individual man will insist on buying what he wants and can pay for. If you refuse to take his check, he will bring on the gold. So, too, men in classes, communities, or parties will insist upon what they think they have the right and the might for. If we refuse to let them stand up and be counted, they will stand up and fight—if they know how, or as soon as they learn how. It is galling to a citizen of education and refinement to see great and some times difficult questions decided by the votes of the new-comer and the illiterate; but our only safety is manhood suffrage, because the final arbiter is manhood strength.

These considerations lead directly to the conclusion that woman suffrage would be a serious mistake. A ballot put into the box by a woman would be simply a blank cartridge; and already we have more than a million blank-cartridge ballots, all of which are solemnly warranted by law, but all of which count for nothing, and will continue to count for nothing until each is backed by a pellet of lead and a pinch of powder, ready to enforce its decree. Our greatest peril arises from the even division of parties. When we

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elect a president by a popular majority of less than one per cent. of all the votes, there must always be a temptation to the defeated party to try the experiment of not submitting, and we have seen what this led to in one notable instance. Nor is that the only instance. When a newly elected legislative body shows an almost even division of parties, there is pretty certain to be an attempt on the part of the minority to seize the place and power of the majority. Then we see a city hall besieged, or the doors of an assembly-chamber battered down with axes. To make any party victorious at the polls by means of blank-cartridge ballots would only present an increased temptation to the numerical minority to assert itself as the military majority. Under ordinary circumstances the law might be allowed to have its way ; but sooner or later we should arrive at an extraordinary election, and then—revolution. Doubtless it would be a righteous spectacle to see a million women and half a million men outvoting eight hundred thousand men on some great moral question ; but when the eight hundred thousand decline to submit, who is going to make them ? “ You are to bid any man stand, in the prince’s name. *How if he will not stand ?* Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go ; and presently call the rest of the watch together and thank God

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you are rid of a knave. You are to call at all the ale-houses, and bid those that are drunk get them to bed. *How if they will not?* Why, then, let them alone till they are sober; if they make you not then the better answer, you may say they are not the men you took them for."

"But," says a woman who seeks to be a voter, "I own property, and I pay taxes on it, and I cannot think that taxation without representation is just." This plea has been repeated so often that it is time to point out its fallacy. There are two kinds of taxes—a money tax, and a service tax. The money tax is levied on property, men's and women's alike, *pro rata*. The service tax is levied on men alone. It calls for jury service, police service, military service, and every man takes his chances on it. Sometimes one goes through his seventy years without suffering from it at all; again he spends weary hours in the jury room, or he is sworn in as a special constable to quell a riot and fight a mob, or he is called to camp and battlefield, where he may lose a limb, or an eye, or his life. Representation goes with this kind of taxation, and not with the other. Property is protected by the Government, as women are; but property, whether man's or woman's, has no representation. If it had, it must necessarily be in some degree proportional.

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Mr. Astor would have hundreds of times as many votes as I, and I perhaps would have twice as many as the man that sweeps out my office. Instead of that, Mr. Astor has one vote, and I have one vote. And the reason is plain and unanswerable ; it is because Mr. Astor can carry one musket, the sweeper can carry one musket, I can carry one musket. We are allequal on the ballot, because we are all equal on what the ballot represents. Mr. Astor enjoys his great property because the sweeper and I are ready to shoulder our muskets and protect him in it; the sweeper is secure in his little earnings because Mr. Astor and I are ready to stand by him with our muskets; I find it worth while to be industrious because Mr. Astor and the sweeper make it dangerous for anybody to molest me. Without this protection, our possessions would be of no value ; this protection we contribute in equal measure, man for man ; and this same protection we extend to our sisters, our cousins, and our aunts. Frequently an election is for the purpose of determining under what laws and in what manner this protection shall be exercised ; and those who furnish the protection rightfully claim the privilege of dictating its form. The woman-suffragists, so far from suffering taxation without represensation, are asking to be represented where they are not taxed.

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But cripples and blind men vote. Yes, they do, and simply because they are so few that it has not been thought worth while to bar them out. And many men vote who are not liable to military duty; for regular service in a long campaign, a man more than forty-five years of age, or a man with weak lungs, would not be accepted. But such a man might still be very powerful in creating a riot or in suppressing one, in overthrowing a government or in sustaining one in an emergency, and this fact has to be recognized.

It is not to be wondered at that an educated and patriotic woman frets a little when she sees an ignorant or vicious man going to the polls while she stays at home, nor that she should sometimes assert herself by asking if she is not intellectually and morally superior to him. So is a man intellectually superior to a sledge-hammer; but when he wishes to rend a granite rock he does not pry at it with his fingers; he persuades the sledge-hammer to do his bidding. Similarly, it would be futile for her to go to the ballot-box and with her own fair hand throw in a blank-cartridge ballot; but if through argument or entreaty she can persuade a musket-bearer to throw a right ballot instead of a wrong one, she can accomplish something worthy. And the means of enlightening and convincing voters, through print and

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oratory, are all quite as free to women as to men. An unenforcible ballot would be as useless as an irredeemable currency, and far more mischievous.

This subject of the suffrage is not a question of courtesy and chivalry toward women—those are abundantly shown in the statutes of nearly every State, which are more favorable to women than to men. It is a question of the stability of our government, and the success of democratic institutions. Universal peace has not yet arrived; the great struggle that has wrenched mankind through the ages is still going on, and one may see it in various phases in our own country as well as in the bristling armies of Europe. Men never have, whether savage or civilized, been accustomed, in fighting their battles, to put the non-combatants in the forefront, whose station in the rear may be quite as honorable and far more useful. Wherever we place the ballot, manhood must necessarily be the power behind it to give it effect; and manhood suffrage is therefore the logical suffrage and the only safe experiment.

The planet on which we live was once a molten mass, and nobody knows how many million years the process of cooling went on before it had a solid crust sufficient to support the various forms of life. That it was far slower than earlier cosmogonists believed is shown by every successive

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advance of science. A generation ago the geologists told us the crust was about fifty miles thick; now they calculate it at seven miles, and Vesuvius and Krakatoa and Kilauea still mutter their awful warnings. Socially, we are in a similar condition---

For we are ancients of the earth,
And in the morning of the times.

When the good Prince Albert, in 1851, invented world's fairs and organized the first one, it was hoped that the brotherhood of man had been demonstrated, and the era of universal peace begun; but in three years there was a bloody war that involved more than half of Europe, in which the only thing contended for was commercial supremacy. And many who read this page have seen in our freest of all free countries a million men fighting to the death and spending their last dollar for what they themselves now admit was a mistake. Boast as we may of our inventions, our arts, and our learning, our fair gardens, our romantic palaces, and our courts of equity, we have yet but a thin crust of civilization spread over a heated mass of savagery; and organized force is all that saves us from anarchy. Of all the women who are asking for an irresponsible ballot, there is not one who would dare to walk through our metropolis in broad daylight, past its churches,

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its art-galleries, and its court-houses, if it were not for the policeman at the corner and the great armory whose shadow crosses the avenue and falls upon the steps of the sanctuary; and of the unthinking men who wish to give it to them from a vague sense of fairness, there is not one who could go alone into the coal-regions and proclaim his opinion that the great strike is unjust.

Such is the brutal truth about the suffrage and its basis; and a brutal truth, when it exists, must be admitted and reckoned with like any other truth. In our elections as now held, there is no security for the verdict unless the majority is sufficient to assure those who are in the minority that if they refuse to submit they will be coerced. With the proposed extension of the suffrage, if the votes of the women are so divided as not to affect the result, then the women might as well not have voted, and their presence at the polls will be a useless and costly addition to the electoral machinery. On the other hand, if an election is carried by a preponderance of votes cast by women, who is to enforce the verdict? When a few such verdicts have been overturned, we shall find ourselves in a state of anarchy.

We may admit all that those excellent women say about the purity of their politics, their determination to educate themselves on public questions,

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and the probability that they would vote in the interests of civilization and good morals. The difficulty is, that the ignorant are not ignorant enough. When the virtuous woman, the well-bred woman, the enlightened woman, goes to the polls, she will meet there no man so ignorant as not to know perfectly well that his ballot has a metallic basis and must be respected, while hers is nothing but paper, and he may respect it or not, as he pleases.



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